

# Member Spotlight



**KRAUS-ANDERSON®**

**JAY VANDER LEEST, Director of Safety**



**I'm Jay Vander Leest, director of safety for Kraus-Anderson Construction Company. I've spent my entire career in the construction industry, beginning as a carpenter and site superintendent before moving into safety, and I've been part of KA's safety team for 25 years.**

**K**raus-Anderson was established in 1897 in Minneapolis and today is a diversified corporation including commercial real estate and development, insurance and financial services, working with clients all over the country. KA is among the top commercial construction managers in the Midwest, based in Minneapolis with regional offices in Bismarck, ND; Madison, WI; and in Rochester, Duluth and Bemidji, MN. We perform hundreds of millions of dollars of work each year on a wide spectrum of commercial construction projects, with national rankings in healthcare and K-12 school construction. But one of our proudest achievements is our safety performance, consistently ranked within the top 20 percent of construction firms nationally. We're annually recognized for safety achievements by the Minnesota Safety Council, MN AGC, WI AGC, ND AGC, National AGC, and LECET — Laborers-Employers Cooperation and Education Trust.

## What does safety mean to your company?

One of Kraus-Anderson's core values is value people. Nothing reflects that value more strongly than the importance we place on safety, doing everything we can to make sure everybody goes home to their families at the end of the day. Construction industry professionals routinely work on and around numerous potential hazards. But based on our experience, we take the position that all accidents are foreseeable, predictable and preventable. We strive for zero injuries on every project through good management, utilization of resources, a proactive approach to safety, a strong supervisory presence and hazard assessments. It's our goal to provide staff, visitors, KA employees, subs and vendors working on or visiting the project site with a safe experience that meets expectations and guidelines.

Our formal, written safety and health program addresses general safety and OSHA standards and guidelines; and also incorporates applicable federal, state and local regulations into the program. Beyond this, we work collaboratively and proactively with OSHA on programs that reflect our leadership in promoting worker health and safety, including injury statistics that are at least 40 percent below the industry average. Since 2013, we've partnered with the Associated General Contractors of MN (AGC) and achieved Construction Health and Safety Excellence (CHASE) MN Level 2 and the site-specific CHASE Level 3, which we've implemented to date on three projects.

## Describe a defining safety moment.

I really can't overstate the importance of active leadership making and enforcing that safety is priority. Our top leaders take an active role in mandating and setting the example that safety is baked into everything we do. Our interns and new hires promptly receive safety orientations. Personal protective equipment (PPE) is enforced one hundred percent on our job sites — even visitors to the site. Toolbox talks are a regular feature of KA project sites. Our meetings — whether jobsite kickoff, field operations, project management, senior leadership, Lean Coffees — all begin with a safety moment. Our annual safety slogan contest is open to all KA employees and their family members. Everybody gets involved, but the inspiration and the leadership really comes from the top.

## What advice would you give to other safety leaders?

Senior leadership buy-in is key. Strive for best practices and continuous improvement. Instill in every employee the importance of thinking safety and looking out for one another. Think before you work!